

LITHUANIA 2022 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Republic of Lithuania is a constitutional, multiparty, parliamentary democracy. Legislative authority resides in the Seimas (a unicameral parliament), and executive authority resides in the prime minister and the cabinet of ministers. Observers evaluated the presidential elections and European parliamentary elections in 2019 and the national parliamentary elections in 2020 as generally free and fair.

Police and the State Border Guard Service are subordinate to the Ministry of the Interior. The Special Investigative Service, the main anticorruption agency, reports to the president and parliament. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over police, the State Border Guards Service, the army, and the Special Investigative Service. Members of the security forces committed some abuses.

Irregular migrants who entered without passing through a formal border checkpoint continued to cross the border from Belarus. Since August 2021, the government has controlled the border by, among other measures, “pushing back” irregular migrants; violent incidents involving migrants have declined since the government constructed a barrier fence along its Belarusian frontier. Following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February, Lithuania enacted a series of states of emergency under the constitution, which included restrictions on freedom of expression for anyone who might support Russia’s actions.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of harsh and life-threatening prison conditions in some prisons.

The government had mechanisms in place to identify and punish officials who may commit human rights abuses or engage in corruption.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person

a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or Politically

Motivated Killings

There were no reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and Other Related Abuses

The constitution and law prohibit such practices. A delegation of the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) visited the country in December 2021, the committee's eighth visit. The CPT's report has not yet been published. In an earlier report published in 2019, the CPT stated it had heard allegations of excessive force exerted by prison staff at the Alytus, Marijampole, and Pravieniskes prisons in subduing interprisoner violence.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Some prison and detention center conditions remained poor due to inadequate sanitation, poor medical care, and high levels of interprisoner violence. As of mid-November, 278 irregular migrants still lived in foreigner registration centers. Some of the migrants endured inadequate conditions (shelter, etc.) after crossing the border from Belarus.

On June 21, parliament approved the reorganization of the prison system by merging 10 state prison institutions into one legal entity, the Lithuanian Prison Service. The stated purpose was to allow for a more efficient distribution of costs, a reduction of management personnel, an increase in the number of officers working with convicts, and improved health care services for convicts. The changes were scheduled to enter into force on January 1, 2023.

Abusive Physical Conditions: The 2019 CPT report noted substandard conditions at the Alytus, Marijampole, and Pravieniskes prisons. Inmates in all

three prisons, but particularly Marijampole and Pravieniskes, complained about the poor quality of rations and, especially, the meager quantity of food.

The CPT received numerous allegations of deliberate physical mistreatment and excessive use of force by prison staff at the Alytus, Marijampole, and Pravieniskes prisons. The CPT assessed that medical evidence corroborated the reports of physical abuse. The CPT also noted that prison staff used excessive force including punches, kicks, and truncheon blows to de-escalate violence among prisoners. The CPT reported “truly extraordinary levels of interprisoner violence, intimidation, and exploitation” in these prisons. It also reported that inmates seeking protection from fellow prisoners had to spend months (usually six months), if not years, in small and often dilapidated cells, and were subjected to severe limitations (no activities, no association, no long-term visits), that amounted to de facto solitary confinement. Many prisoners told the CPT they had sought placement in the punishment blocks because they feared being forced to become drug addicts and contracting HIV and hepatitis C. To address these problems, the government supplemented prison officer training programs with topics on policies and practices that should be in place to prevent violence, threats, and stress.

On May 24 and June 20, the parliamentary ombudsperson carried out torture prevention monitoring at the Medininkai Foreigners’ Registration Center (FRC) where irregular migrants were held. On July 8, the parliamentary ombudsperson published a report saying that the conditions there amounted to “degrading treatment.” On September 2, the government officially closed the Medininkai FRC.

The parliamentary ombudsperson noted in the report that the nature and degree of the actual restrictions applied to foreigners held in another center, the Kybartai FRC, such as the material reception conditions, the nature of supervision, the control of the persons being held, the strict restrictions on freedom of movement, and the indeterminant length of stay of individuals being held were equivalent to detention.

Administration: The law requires the Office of the Parliamentary Ombudsperson to investigate detention centers and social care institutions. The ombudsperson’s office generally investigated prisoner, migrant, and asylum seeker complaints and

attempted to resolve them, usually by making recommendations to the institutions concerned and monitoring their implementation. The ombudsperson's office reported that prison institutions were responsive to most of its interventions.

Independent Monitoring: The government permitted monitoring by independent nongovernmental observers. The CPT visited the country in December 2021, but the report has not been published.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention and provides for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of his or her arrest or detention in court. The government generally observed these requirements.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

Except for persons arrested while committing a crime, warrants are generally required for arrests, and judges may issue them only upon the presentation of reliable evidence of criminal activity. Police may detain suspects for up to 48 hours before formally charging them. Detainees have the right to be informed of the charges against them at the time of their arrest or their first interrogation. The government generally observed these requirements.

The law provides for access to attorneys, and the government provides attorneys to indigent persons. A detained person has the right to meet with lawyers of his or her choice in private before his or her first interrogation.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution provides for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respected judicial independence and impartiality.

Trial Procedures

The constitution and law provide for the right to a fair and public trial, and an independent judiciary generally enforced this right.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Plaintiffs may sue for legal relief or temporary protection measures from human rights abuses. Persons alleging human rights abuses may also appeal to the parliamentary ombudsperson for a determination of the merits of their claims. Although the ombudsperson may only make recommendations to an offending institution, authorities generally implemented the ombudsperson's recommendations. Individuals alleging violations of the European Convention on Human Rights by the government may, after exhausting domestic legal remedies, appeal to the European Court of Human Rights.

Property Seizure and Restitution

The government has laws and mechanisms in place to address communal property restitution, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and advocacy groups reported that the government made some progress on the resolution of Holocaust-era claims, including for foreign citizens. A philanthropic foundation created in 2011 to receive government compensation for Communist and Nazi seizures of Jewish community-owned property distributed funds to individuals and to Jewish educational, cultural, scientific, and religious projects. According to an agreement between the government and the Jewish community, the foundation was to disburse 37.07 million euros (\$39.66 million) by 2023. In 2013 and 2014, the foundation distributed a onetime payment to individual survivors, totaling 870,000 euros (\$930,000). The foundation's board allocated the remaining funds to support Jewish educational, cultural, scientific, and religious projects. During the year the foundation received 3.62 million euros (\$3.87 million) for this purpose, which brought the total received to 33.45 million euros (\$35.79 million). Jewish and ethnic Polish communities continued to advocate for private property restitution because there had been no opportunity to submit individual claims since 2001, when the country's existing restitution law stopped allowing citizens who resided in the country to apply for private property restitution. Despite changes to the law in 2011 that made it easier to reacquire citizenship, the government did not reopen

the application period for individuals from these communities and others who had been excluded from filing claims based on citizenship.

Parliament in December passed a government-proposed bill to create a new 37 million euros (\$39.59 million) compensation mechanism for private and heirless Jewish property. Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė personally sponsored the bill and said that restitution is important as a moral debt to those who lost their lives and property in the Holocaust. The law would allocate up to 10 million euros (\$10.7 million) from the total amount for individual requests for compensation for property not covered by previous legislation. The Israeli Embassy issued supportive statements, and key private international groups expressed support. There was criticism from some Jewish groups about the proposed method of distribution of the money, while others were highly supportive, including many major international organizations.

The Department of State's Justice for Uncompensated Survivors Today (JUST) Act report to Congress, released publicly in 2020, can be found on the Department's website at: <https://www.state.gov/reports/just-act-report-to-congress/>.

f. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The constitution prohibits such actions. There were reports, however, that the government failed to respect these prohibitions.

The law requires authorities to obtain a judge's authorization before searching an individual's premises. It prohibits indiscriminate monitoring, including of email, text messages, or other digital communications intended to remain private.

Domestic human rights groups alleged that the government did not always properly enforce the law. By September 1, the State Data Protection Inspectorate investigated 614 complaints of privacy abuses, compared with 814 complaints during the same eight-month period in 2021. Most complaints were individuals' claims that the government had collected and disclosed their personal information, such as identity numbers, without a legal justification. Other complaints related to the right of access to data, video surveillance, and the security of data processing.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for Members of the Press and Other Media

The constitution provides for freedom of expression, including for members of the press, and other media, and the government generally respected this right. An independent press, an effective judiciary, and a functioning democratic political system combined to promote freedom of expression, including for members of the media.

Freedom of Expression: The constitutional definition of freedom of expression does not permit slander; disinformation; or incitement to violence, discrimination, or national, racial, religious, or social hatred. Inciting hatred against a group of persons is punishable by imprisonment for up to two years. Inciting violence against a group of persons is punishable by imprisonment for up to three years.

In response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, on February 24 the president proposed a state of emergency, under section 144, which the parliament approved. It has adopted two more declarations of a state of emergency since then, modifying the scope of its effect. The state of emergency limits some rights to freedom of expression and assembly. The current state of emergency applies only in border areas and was scheduled to remain in effect until March 17, 2023.

The government banned rallies or marches in favor of Russia's war in Ukraine during the state of emergency. The series of states of emergency have included restrictions on freedom of expression for anyone who might support Russia's actions. On April 19, the government made legal changes under the state of emergency banning the public display of symbols viewed as having Russian prowar messages, such as the letters "V" and "Z."

In November 2021, parliament declared a state of emergency under section 144 of the constitution, applicable to regions on the border with Belarus and in areas where irregular migrants were being housed. The declaration was the first of its kind since the restoration of the country's independence. Under section 145 of the constitution, the declaration allows the suspension of certain constitutional rights,

including freedom of expression.

It is a crime to deny or “grossly to trivialize” Soviet or Nazi German crimes against the country or its citizens, or to deny genocide, crimes against humanity, or war crimes.

Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other Media, Including Online Media: The Radio and Television Commission of Lithuania (LRTK) may impose a 72-hour suspension on television programs that posed a threat to public and national security. The LRTK may impose this suspension without a court order on television programs from countries both inside and outside the EU, the European Economic Area, and from European states that ratified the Council of Europe’s Convention on Transfrontier Television.

On September 22, parliament adopted amendments to the Law on Public Information and extended the ban on broadcasting and distribution of Russian and Belarusian television channels, which was previously banned under the state of emergency. The ban on rebroadcasting and distributing on the internet radio and television programs of entities established in Russia or Belarus was scheduled to be in effect until October 1, 2024. An exception was made for channels distributed by European Union countries.

In July 2021, in response to the increased number of irregular migrants crossing the border of Belarus, the government declared it to be “an extreme situation.” In August 2021, journalists complained that authorities restricted their access to the state border protection zone where migrants crossed into the country and were held. In September 2021, journalists appealed to the authorities and were given the opportunity to enter the state border protection zone. In November 2021, parliament approved a state of emergency along the border and in migrant registration centers and limited media access to those in migrant centers. According to the Human Rights Monitoring Institute, journalists were limited in their ability to observe and report on how “push-backs” of migrants were carried out, and faced bureaucratic obstacles when accessing migration centers.

Libel/Slander Laws: The law makes insulting or defaming the president of the country in mass media a crime punishable by a fine. Authorities did not invoke it

during the year.

Internet Freedom

The government did not restrict or disrupt access to the internet or censor online content, and there were no reports that the government monitored private online communications without appropriate legal authority. On April 19, parliament approved amendments to the Law on the Provision of Information to the Public that give the inspector of journalist ethics new powers to issue binding instructions to internet providers to remove prohibited information, such as war propaganda, incitement of discrimination, and violence. The amendments came into effect on April 29. The new legislation establishes two procedures: routine, when the violation is repeated, and urgent, when the information endangers the interests of public safety. The inspector of journalist ethics needs a court warrant to suspend the activities of a media outlet. The suspension or termination of a media outlet's activities is only possible when the information disseminated is “harmful to society in general, rather than to individuals.” There have been no cases brought under this law to date.

Restrictions on Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

On March 3, the Ministries of Culture and Foreign Affairs issued a statement to public and private cultural institutions, associations, and event organizers recommending the temporary limitation of cooperation and not invite Russian performers and cultural figures to the country, except for those who have publicly condemned the Kremlin regime's military aggression against Ukraine and the democratic world.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The constitution and law provide for the freedoms of peaceful assembly and association, and the government generally respected these rights, except for some organizations associated with the period of Soviet occupation of Lithuania, and restrictions applied by the state of emergency.

In January the Family Movement applied to hold a “Great Family Defense March” in Vilnius’ Vingis Park on June 15. On March 10, the Vilnius Municipality denied

the application, stating that the event would violate public safety. The group appealed the decision to the courts, while holding a reduced event at a private facility in Kaunas. On June 28, the Vilnius District Court recognized that the actions of the Vilnius municipality were illegal. The court awarded 823 euros (\$881) in litigation costs to the Family Movement from the Vilnius municipality.

Under the state of emergency, the government prohibited organizing and participating in meetings that have the purpose of supporting the actions of Russia and Belarus.

Freedom of Association

Although the law provides for this freedom and the government generally respected it, the government continued to ban the Communist Party and other organizations associated with the Soviet period.

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/.

d. Freedom of Movement and the Right to Leave the Country

The constitution and law provide for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights.

e. Protection of Refugees

The government generally cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees, or asylum seekers, as well as other persons of concern.

Access to Asylum: The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government has established a system for providing protection to refugees. Nearly 4,500 irregular migrants, mostly from the Middle East and Africa, crossed into Lithuania from Belarus starting in June 2021. In response, in 2021 authorities adopted new legislation prescribing the automatic detention of those who cross the

border into Lithuanian territory without undergoing the correct legal process, such as having a visa. After having been detained for the maximum statutory length of one year, most of these individuals were eligible for release later in the year. Nearly 1,300 migrants were released, among them 138 who were released early after receiving asylum. Many released migrants went to other EU countries. In mid-November, the Migration Department reported that 287 migrants remained in foreigner registration centers, many by choice, as they had freedom of movement within Lithuania but no other lodging.

In August 2021, the Ministry of Interior established a “pushback policy,” allowing border guards to deny entry to undocumented and irregular migrants. Since then, state border guards have sent more than 14,500 persons back to Belarus. The only migrants granted entry after the establishment of the policy appeared to be humanitarian cases, and then only if they had required documentation.

Safe Country of Origin/Transit: In compliance with the EU’s Dublin III Regulation, authorities barred asylum seekers arriving from safe countries of origin or transit; authorities returned them to such countries without reviewing the substantive merits of their applications.

Abuse of Migrants and Refugees: On June 27, Amnesty International released a report alleging abuses against irregular migrants who crossed into Lithuania from Belarus. The report said Lithuanian authorities arbitrarily detained those in militarized centers and subjected them to ill-treatment. The Amnesty International report claimed migrants were denied access to fair asylum procedures in the hope that they would “voluntarily” return to their countries of origin. Amnesty International claimed these policies violate international and EU laws related to refoulement. The International Red Cross and other humanitarian organizations also raised concerns about the shortage of health and psychological services provided to the migrants.

Media reported that in April, the Vilnius District Prosecutor's Office launched a pretrial investigation into the possible long-term sexual abuse of migrants housed in one of the State Border Protection Service’s Foreigner Registration Centers. The representative of the prosecutor's office told media that suspicions have been brought against one person, and one person has been recognized as a victim, who

was not named.

Freedom of Movement: On June 30, the European Court of Justice (ECJ) ruled that a law enabling automatic detention and denial of asylum petitions for irregular migrants was contrary to EU law. The ECJ argued that applicants for international protection may be detained only if authorities could demonstrate that the individual constituted a security threat. The court argued that irregularly crossing a border does not make a person a threat to security and rejected the government's argument that the influx of irregular migrants constituted a security threat. The court did not recommend a specific solution or demand action. Under the legislation, adopted in July 2021, irregular migrants could be detained for up to 18 months (in practice, the third six-month detention period was never activated), with decisions taken every six months. Migrants registered in the country were issued a foreigner's registration certificate, but it did not give them the right to leave Lithuania or request asylum in another EU country. According to Lithuanian officials, if migrants were later detained in any other EU country, they would be returned to Lithuania.

In November 2021, parliament declared a state of emergency under section 144 of the constitution, applicable to regions on the border with Belarus and in areas where irregular migrants were being housed. The declaration was the first of its kind since the restoration of the country's independence and gave the military additional powers, including the use of force, to enforce expanded restrictions on movement and assembly in response to the surge in irregular migration. The declaration allows the suspension of certain constitutional rights, which the government stated it used to limit the ability of irregular migrants in camps to access the internet and communicate by telephone and in writing. Parliament refined the state of emergency on September 15, restricting it to areas bordering Russia and Belarus while terminating it in the interior of the country. On September 19, the government introduced a ban on Russian nationals with tourist visas entering the country.

Access to Basic Services: NGOs reported that refugees reported language barriers that prevented them from accessing health and psychological consulting services.

Durable Solutions: In cases where asylum was not granted, the government

began seeking to facilitate migrants' return to their countries of origin. More than 90 percent of irregular migrants arrived in the country without identity documents, complicating the government's efforts to return them to their countries of habitual residence or country of origin. In 2021, nearly 4,500 individuals, mostly from the Middle East and Africa, crossed into the country from Belarus, generally avoiding border crossing facilities. In addition to the 278 migrants remaining in detention facilities, about 1,300 have already been released after reaching the maximum one-year period allowed for detention. Approximately 1,000 have returned to their home countries voluntarily after accepting financial incentives provided by the government (1,000 euros per adult, and 500 per child).

Temporary Protection: According to the Migration Department, in 2021 the number of foreigners who settled in the country increased by 60 percent (from 91,379 to 145,118) and on July 1 accounted for 5.13 percent of the total population of the country. This change was largely driven by the temporary protection mechanism applied for the first time in the history of the European Union in response to the conflict in Ukraine. As of the end of October, temporary protection was granted to more than 69,000 Ukrainians who were fleeing the war. Authorities may also grant "subsidiary protection" to individuals who may not qualify as refugees. According to the Migration Department, in the first half of the year the government granted subsidiary protection to nine persons.

f. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons

Not applicable.

g. Stateless Persons

The law permits persons born in the country or legally residing there for 10 years, and who are not citizens of any other country, to apply for citizenship. Applicants must possess an unlimited residence permit, knowledge of the Lithuanian language and constitution, and the ability to support themselves. According to the Migration Department, there were 2,683 stateless persons in 2021, and 31 stateless persons became citizens in 2021.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The constitution provides citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage, and citizens participated in elections.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: Presidential elections, including a runoff between the two candidates receiving the most votes, as well as European Parliamentary elections, took place in 2019. National parliamentary elections took place in 2020. Observers evaluated all these elections as generally free and fair.

Political Parties and Political Participation: The government continued to prohibit the Communist Party.

Participation of Women and Members of Minority Groups: No laws limit the participation of women or members of minority groups in the political process, and they did participate. In the 2020 parliamentary elections, women won 38 of the 141 seats (27 percent). Women were appointed speaker of parliament and prime minister. Six of the 14 cabinet ministers were women. In June 2021, the first woman president of the Constitutional Court was appointed.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, and the government generally implemented the law effectively. There were isolated reports of government corruption during the year.

Corruption: The European Research Center for Anticorruption and State-building and Transparency International reported that corruption remained a problem, in part due to inadequate enforcement of the country's anticorruption law, including in the medical services sector. On June 28, parliament approved the 2022-2033 National Agenda for the Prevention of Corruption.

Section 5. Governmental Posture Towards International and

Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights

A variety of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials were often cooperative and responsive to their views.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The Office of the Parliamentary Ombudsperson has three mandates: to investigate complaints regarding abuse of office or other abuses of human rights involving public administration; to implement the national prevention of torture mechanism under the UN's Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture; and to serve as an accredited national human rights institution. In the last capacity, the parliamentary ombudsperson is responsible for reporting and monitoring human rights problems, cooperating with international and domestic human rights organizations, and promoting human rights awareness and education.

The equal opportunities ombudsperson (EOO) operates as an independent public institution accountable to parliament and is responsible for the enforcement of the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men and the Law on Equal Treatment, with responsibility for implementing and enforcing rights under the law.

A children's rights ombudsperson is responsible for overseeing observance of children's rights and their legal interests. It may initiate investigations of possible abuses of such rights, either upon receipt of a complaint or on its own initiative.

Parliament's Human Rights Committee prepares and reviews draft laws and other legal acts related to civil rights and presents recommendations to government institutions and other organizations concerning problems related to the protection of civil rights. It also receives reports from the Office of the Parliamentary Ombudsperson.

Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: Rape of a person, regardless of gender, as well as domestic violence are criminal offenses. Penalties for domestic violence depend on the level of injury to the survivor or victim, ranging from required public service to life imprisonment.

In the first eight months of the year, authorities received 73 reports of rape, compared with 61 during the same period in 2021 and 63 in 2020. Convicted rapists generally received prison sentences of three to five years. No law specifically criminalizes spousal rape, and no data on spousal rape was available.

Although the law criminalizes domestic abuse, it remained a pervasive problem. In the first eight months of the year, police registered 4,318 criminal offenses related to domestic violence, compared with 4,206 in 2021 and 7,126 in 2020. According to the Department of Statistics, 21 domestic violence-related femicides were registered in the first eight months of the year, compared with 28 in 2020 and 21 in 2019. On March 15, parliament approved amendments to the Law on Domestic Violence by introducing an order for protection from domestic violence that allows police to separate abusers from their victims. The government allocated 1.53 million euros (\$1.64 million) to specialized assistance centers working in the field of domestic violence prevention.

According to a 2020 survey by the Women's Information Center, only 15 percent of those surveyed who had experienced domestic violence had contacted police. In 2021, the Department of Statistics carried out a survey, which found that 25.2 percent of women and 20 percent of men have experienced physical violence, including threats, or sexual violence.

The government operated a 24/7 national hotline and 29 crisis centers for survivors of domestic violence. On April 11, the government adopted its *Action Plan for Domestic Violence Prevention and Assistance to Victims for 2022*.

Sexual Harassment: The law prohibits sexual harassment. The law defines sexual harassment as offensive verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature,

towards a person with whom they work, conduct business, or have other relations. Harassment is defined in the same law as unwanted conduct related to the sex of a person that occurs with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, and creating an intimidating, hostile, humiliating or offensive environment. Pretrial investigations of sexual harassment were relatively rare. According to the equal opportunities ombudsperson, harassment is underreported due to intimidation, fear of job loss, or lack of knowledge about one's rights regarding sexual harassment.

Reproductive Rights: There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities. On August 12, the minister of health decided that women who wish to terminate pregnancy would be able to do so without surgical intervention, by taking drugs prescribed by a doctor.

The country lacked consistent sex education programs, and there was a lack of publicly available information of contraception as a method of family planning. According to the Family Planning and Sexual Health Association, students at school receive little or no information about contraception and how to protect themselves from sexually transmitted infections including HIV and AIDS. According to the Human Rights Coalition, some young women and girls in rural areas, mostly Roma, had limited access to reproductive health services and modern contraceptives due to poverty, social stigma, and lack of parental consent.

The government provided access to sexual and reproductive health services for survivors of sexual violence. The country had no rape crisis center, but a network of specialized NGOs provided social, psychological, health, and legal assistance to survivors of domestic and sexual violence. A national women's helpline also assisted survivors. The Ministry of Social Security and Labor supported psychological consulting support services. During a May 20 conference entitled "The system of assistance to victims of sexual abuse in Lithuania: reality and vision for improvement," the speaker of the parliament noted that the war in Ukraine revealed shortcomings in assistance to victims of sexual abuse in Lithuania, as the system was ineffective and lacked trained specialists. NGO experts noted that, after coming to Lithuania, refugee survivors of sexual abuse did not receive the effective help they needed. On August 24, the Vilnius University's Faculty of Law, the Centre Against Human Trafficking and Exploitation, and the

Ukrainian Women Lawyers Association JurFem launched an international campaign “Rape is a war crime,” which aimed to raise awareness about gender-based violence in war zones and provide help to victims of sexual violence. The campaign's website provides key information on medical, legal, and psychological support available to survivors.

Discrimination: The law provides for the same legal status and rights for women as for men, including family, religious, personal status, and nationality laws, as well as laws related to labor, property, inheritance, employment, access to credit, and owning or managing businesses or property. The government enforced the law effectively. Women continued to experience unequal access to pension benefits and the gender wage gap remained significant, leaving women more exposed to poverty risk (see section 7.d.).

Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination

The law prohibits discrimination against ethnic or national minorities, but intolerance and societal discrimination persisted. According to the 2021 census, approximately 15.4 percent of the population were members of minority ethnic groups, including Russians, Poles, Belarusians, Ukrainians, Tatars, Karaites, and Jews.

On January 18, parliament legalized the original spelling of names and surnames with Latin characters in personal documents. The law, which came into force on May 1, states that citizens can use non-Lithuanian Latin characters – Q, W, and X – in their names in identification documents. A further step to legalize use of Polish diacritic marks was not passed. This is a change long demanded by the country’s Polish community, the country’s largest ethnic minority.

In August the country reorganized schools nationwide, one result of which was the closure of several small Polish-language schools around Trakai. Polish-language schooling remains available in the municipality.

Roma, whose population in the 2021 census was 2,251 persons (0.07 percent of the country’s total population), continued to experience discrimination. After a Roma settlement in Kirtimai was demolished in 2020, housing remained the main challenge for Roma, who often experienced discrimination by landlords who did

not want to rent to them. In a 2021 poll conducted by the NGO Diversity Development Group and the media monitoring and journalism innovation program Media4change, Roma remained the most unfavorably viewed ethnic group in the country, as 61 percent of respondents indicated that they would not want to live in a neighborhood with Roma or rent them an apartment.

In 2020, Vilnius Municipality approved a new Roma integration program for 2020-23. The plan offered new solutions to strengthen the areas of health care, social care, and culture, but provided very limited measures in the field of housing, employment, and education.

Children

Birth Registration: Citizenship may be acquired either by birth in the country or through one's parents. The government registered all births promptly.

Child Abuse: The law bans all violence against children. Sexual abuse of children remained a problem despite prison sentences of up to 13 years for the crime. In the first eight months of the year, the Ministry of the Interior recorded 37 cases of child rape and 192 cases involving other forms of child sexual abuse. In 2022, the Ministry of Social Security and Labor funded 10 NGOs that provide comprehensive services to children who have experienced or witnessed violence. The government operated a children's support center to provide medical and psychological care for children, including those who suffered from various types of violence. It also operated a national center in Vilnius to provide legal, psychological, and medical assistance to sexually abused children and their families.

The Child Rights Protection Service reported that in the first half of the year 1,345 children suffered physical violence (compared to 780 during the same period in 2021).

In the first eight months of the year, the children's rights ombudsperson reported receiving 121 complaints and started 41 investigations on their own initiative.

During the first eight months of the year, Child Line (a hotline for children and youth) received 96,071 telephone calls from children and responded to 98,712 of

those calls. Child Line also received and answered 478 letters from children, whose concerns ranged from relations with their parents and friends to family violence and sexual abuse.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: The minimum age for marriage is 18.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: Individuals involving a child in pornographic events or using a child in the production of pornographic material are subject to imprisonment for up to five years. Persons who offer to purchase, acquire, sell, transport, or hold a child in captivity are subject to imprisonment for three to 12 years. The Office of the Ombudsperson for Children's Rights reported receiving no complaints of alleged sexual exploitation of children during the first eight months of the year. According to the Ministry of the Interior, during the first eight months of the year, officials registered 70 criminal cases involving child pornography. The age of consent is 16. On November 29, the State Child Rights Protection and Adoption Service under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour launched a new Child Helpline operating throughout the country.

Institutionalized Children: According to experts from the Human Rights Monitoring Institute and other NGOs, deinstitutionalization of childcare was slow, and 1,350 children were still in state care institutions. As of September 1, the children's rights ombudsperson had opened three investigations regarding abuses of children's rights in orphanages and large-family foster homes.

Antisemitism

The Jewish community consists of approximately 4,000 persons. There were reports of antisemitism on the internet and in public. There were several incidents during the year that Holocaust memorial sites were defaced with the "V" and "Z" symbols of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

On March 3, in Pasaltuonis village of Jurbarkas district, a monument to Soviet troops was vandalized with the inscription "Putler Kaput!" and a swastika. Police started a pretrial investigation.

On April 1, Holocaust memorial stones in Paneriai on the outskirts of Vilnius were defaced with the "V" and "Z" symbols. Police reported that a pretrial investigation

had been opened. Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonyte denounced the desecration as “a clear provocation aimed at antagonizing the public in Lithuania.” She said in a statement, “In one of the most tragic places in Lithuania's history, where the Nazis and other criminals murdered thousands of innocent persons, the provocateurs have splashed yet another symbol of hatred.”

On April 12, the Human Rights Committee of parliament condemned the desecration of the Paneriai memorial. On April 21, the police reported that the Holocaust memorial in Paneriai was vandalized again with symbols of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Police said two letters “V” had been painted on the memorial, adding that the incident was being investigated.

On May 12, a monument to Holocaust victims in Darbenai village, Kretinga District was vandalized. Police reported that a pretrial investigation was started against acts of vandalism in a cemetery or other place of public respect, or for a grave vandalized.

Police reported that on August 23, monuments for Holocaust victims in Virbalis village of Vilkaviskis district were found painted with “Z” letters. Police started a pretrial investigation.

On September 18, the Holocaust monuments at Paneriai, including those to Lithuanian freedom fighters and the Soviet-era memorial to victims of fascism, were defaced with “Z” letters. The vandals similarly defaced the exterior of the on-site museum and even surrounding trees. They used paints resistant to removal and avoided the Jewish memorial that is surrounded by security cameras.

The Jewish Community of Lithuania condemned the attacks on the Holocaust memorial in the Paneriai memorial. “The Lithuanian Jewish Community condemns the recent cynical vandalism at the Ponar Memorial Complex mass murder site. Institutional and public apathy regarding such attacks is unacceptable,” the Jewish community said in a statement, calling on the country's responsible institutions to investigate “this disgusting vandalism as quickly as possible.”

On December 15, parliament passed a law establishing a commission of historians to review public “objects” (monuments, symbols, etc.) which support totalitarian

regimes and ideologies. Under this law, the commission has the power to remove public objects which glorify totalitarian ideologies, including Soviet and Nazi memorials.

The municipal government of Vilnius took no action during the year on the memorial plaque honoring Jonas Noreika, a known collaborator with the Nazi occupation regime. The original plaque honoring Noreika was destroyed on April 7, 2019, but it was replaced by a youth organization Pro Patria in September 2019 and remains in place.

The municipal government of Ukmerge district continued to resist calls for the removal of a monument to former partisan Juozas Krikstaponis, who, based on the conclusion of the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania, took part in the killing of Jews in Belarus in 1941.

Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity or Expression, or Sex Characteristics

Criminalization: The law did not criminalize consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults or lesbian, gay, bisexual, transexual, queer, or intersex (LGBTQI+) persons. Facially neutral laws, such as laws on immorality or loitering, were not disproportionately applied to LGBTQI+ persons.

Violence against LGBTQI+ Persons: LGBTQI+ community members reported that acts of violence against LGBTQI+ persons occurred, but that most LGBTQI+ persons did not report such acts due to a lack of trust in the legal system. Transgender persons were vulnerable and regularly experienced extreme violence and death threats.

Discrimination: The law prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation, and sexual orientation may be an aggravating factor in crimes against LGBTQI+

persons. These laws were enforced. There is no legal basis for same-sex couples to be recognized by the state outside of civil or religious marriage. Transgender persons faced legal barriers and discriminatory practices often inhibited them from receiving health care. Societal attitudes toward LGBTQI+ persons remained largely negative, and LGBTQI+ persons experienced stigma, discrimination, and violence. In a 2021 poll conducted by the NGO Diversity Development Group and the media monitoring and journalism innovation program Media4change, 42 percent of those polled said they would not want to live in the neighborhood with LGBTQI+ persons, and 46 percent would not want to rent housing to them.

Availability of Legal Gender Recognition: On August 4, the Health Minister approved a procedure for diagnosing and treating gender identity disorders. Persons seeking hormone treatment must consult with a family doctor or psychiatrist, who may then refer the person to a medical specialist council. Diagnosis and treatment services were to be paid from the Compulsory Health Insurance Fund.

In February an order signed in December 2021 by Minister of Justice Evelina Dobrovolska took effect, allowing transgender persons to change their names with proof of medical diagnosis, ending the requirement to undergo surgical procedures or sterilization.

Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices Specifically Targeting LGBTQI+ Individuals: No laws prohibited so-called conversion therapy practices. According to LGBTQI+ advocates, there was no public information about how or if these practices occur.

Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly: The country restricts freedom of expression for LGBTQI+ topics. The law restricts any information that “encourages a concept of marriage and family other than the one stipulated in the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania or in the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania” as detrimental to minors. It is illegal to publish material that promotes the sexual abuse and harassment of minors, sexual relations among minors, or “sexual relations.” LGBTQI+ groups stated it served to limit LGBTQI+ awareness-raising efforts, as government agencies that oversaw publishing and broadcast media applied it prejudicially against coverage of

LGBTQI+ topics.

Vilnius held a Baltic pride parade, permitted by authorities and secured by police. Several senior political figures, including from the governing coalition, participated.

Persons with Disabilities

The law prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities. There was no proactive enforcement of these requirements. The Ministry of Social Security reported that at the beginning of this year there were 147,500 persons of working age with disabilities, and only one in three of them was employed. On July 19, parliament adopted amendments to legislation expanding opportunities for those with disabilities to participate in the labor market. Support measures include the help of a work assistant to a disabled person when he or she gets a job and support to the employer in adapting the workplace and work environment. The amendments were scheduled to enter in force on January 1, 2023. As of September 1, the equal opportunities ombudsperson had received 31 complaints of alleged discrimination based on disability and found violations in seven cases.

The law requires all schools that provide compulsory and universally accessible education to accommodate students with disabilities. The country has a tradition of separate schools for children with various disabilities. In 2020 parliament amended the Law on Education to eliminate discriminatory provisions regarding children with disabilities who need accommodation or educational support. According to these provisions, which were scheduled to be implemented gradually and fully enter into force on September 1, 2024, children with disabilities who need accommodation or educational support would be able to attend a general education school in their place of residence, and schools would no longer be able to refuse to admit them and refer them to separate so-called special schools.

The law prohibits persons with disabilities who have been deprived of their legal capacity from voting or standing for election. According to the Central Electoral Commission, 67 percent of polling stations were accessible to persons with disabilities in the 2019 presidential elections and 93 percent in 2020 parliamentary elections.

According to the NGO the Lithuanian Forum for Persons with Disabilities (LFPD), deinstitutionalization has been slow in the country, with too little attention paid and inadequate funding devoted to the creation of independent living arrangements for individuals with disabilities, as well as opposition from local communities.

According to the LFPD survey conducted in 2021, only 20 percent of women with disabilities sought help in cases of domestic violence. Surveys showed that 93 percent of the surveyed women with disabilities have experienced psychological violence at least once and 84 percent have encountered physical violence at least once in their life. More than 60 percent of respondents experienced systemic psychological violence; 23.5 percent experienced intense sexual violence, and 25.8 percent experienced systematic physical violence.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

The I Can Live NGO coalition worked with drug addicts and other vulnerable groups and noted that some individuals with HIV and AIDS continued to be subject to discrimination, including in employment, and were treated with fear and aversion. According to the *People Living with HIV Stigma Index* conducted by the NGO coalition in 2018, 90 percent of persons with HIV feared revealing their status to others, and 83 percent were not aware of laws protecting them from discrimination. According to experts, although effective HIV treatment is available, more than half of those with HIV did not seek treatment because of the stigma associated with HIV in society.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provides for the right of workers, except members of the armed forces, to form and join independent unions, bargain collectively, and conduct legal strikes. The law prohibits employer discrimination against union organizers and members and requires reinstatement of workers fired for union activity. These provisions also apply to migrant workers.

There were some specific legal limits to these rights. The law prohibits sympathy strikes. It also prohibits law enforcement officials, first aid medical workers, and

other security-related personnel from collective bargaining and striking, although they may join unions. The law does not afford workers in essential services, whose right to strike is restricted or prohibited, alternative procedures for impartial and rapid settlement of their claims or a voice in developing such procedures.

Labor-management disputes are settled by a labor arbitration board formed under the jurisdiction of the district court where the registered office of the enterprise or entity involved in the collective dispute is located. Although the law establishes the binding character of the decision upon the parties, the decisions cannot lay down rights or obligations of individuals and are not enforceable by the courts. Labor code procedures make it difficult for some workers to exercise the right to strike. The law allows an employer to hire replacement workers in certain sectors to provide for minimum services during strikes.

The government generally respected freedom of association but did not effectively enforce applicable laws, and penalties were less than those for other laws involving denials of civil rights such as discrimination, and persistent harassment and intimidation of employees, commonly called mobbing, in the workplace. According to the International Trade Union Confederation, the judicial system was slow to respond to cases of unfair dismissal and no employer faced penal sanctions for antiunion discrimination as envisaged in the law. No courts or judges specialized in labor disputes.

Employers did not always respect collective bargaining rights and managers often determined wages without regard to union preferences, except in large factories with well-organized unions.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits and criminalizes all forms of forced or compulsory labor, and the government generally enforced the law effectively.

There were instances of forced labor, most of which involved local men subjected to forced labor abroad. Foreign workers from Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine were at risk of labor trafficking as long-haul truck drivers, builders, ship hull assemblers, and welders.

Also see the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

See the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings>.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The law prohibits employment discrimination but does not specifically address HIV-positive or other communicable disease status, or gender identity. The law obliges the employer to implement the principles of gender equality and nondiscrimination, which prohibit direct and indirect discrimination, and psychological and sexual harassment. The employer must apply the same selection criteria and conditions when hiring new employees; provide equal working conditions, opportunities for professional development, and benefits; apply equal and uniform criteria for dismissal; pay equal wages for the same work and for work of equal value; and take measures to prevent psychological and sexual harassment in the workplace. On June 28, parliament adopted amendments to the Equal Opportunities Law establishing an obligation for employers to take measures to ensure that employees are not discriminated against in the workplace due to the granting of paternity, childcare, or unpaid leave to care for a sick family member, as well as for needing a flexible work schedule. The amendments came into force on August 1. On June 28, parliament also adopted amendments to the Labor Code to help prevent harassment and intimidation at work. The Labor Code was supplemented with provisions defining violence and harassment at work and provided measures employers must take to prevent it.

The government effectively enforced the law, and penalties were commensurate with laws related to civil rights, such as election interference.

The law stipulates that discrimination based on sex should also cover discrimination related to pregnancy and maternity (childbirth and breastfeeding). A pay gap between men and women continued to exist. In addition, government social payments were not equal for men and women, contributing to a higher

poverty rate among elderly women.

The EOO monitored the implementation of discrimination laws; as of September 1, the EOO received 25 complaints related to employment. To address the gender equality problem, the EOO worked with municipalities to help them create and implement a monitoring mechanism for actions and measures that ensure equal opportunities for women and men. Under the law the age requirements for women and men to retire with full or partial pension benefits are not equal.

NGOs reported that workers in the Romani, LGBTQI+, and HIV-positive communities faced social and employment discrimination (see section 6).

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

Wage and Hour Laws: The labor law limits annual maximum overtime to 180 hours and establishes different categories of work contracts, such as for permanent, fixed-term, temporary agency, apprenticeship, project, job-sharing, employee-sharing, and seasonal work. Employers and employees may mutually agree to a higher amount of maximum overtime through the collective bargaining process.

According to the National Department of Statistics, as of January 1, the minimum monthly wage increased by 14 percent and was above the poverty line. The minimum wage increased by another 15 percent at the end of the year.

Occupational Safety and Health: Occupational safety and health (OSH) standards were appropriate for the main industries in the country, such as petroleum refining, food processing, energy supplies, chemicals, furniture, wood products, textiles, and clothing. The law applies to both national and foreign workers. The government effectively enforced OSH laws, and penalties were commensurate with those for crimes such as negligence.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement: The State Labor Inspectorate (SLI), which is responsible for implementing labor laws, had a staff sufficient to enforce compliance. During the first eight months of the year, the SLI conducted 5,854 inspections at companies and other institutions. Of these cases, 80 percent were related to underpayment or late payment of wages, or worker safety. Workers dissatisfied with the results of an investigation may appeal to the court system.

According to the SLI, violations of wage, overtime, and OSH laws occurred primarily in the construction, retail, and manufacturing sectors. The SLI received complaints concerning hazardous conditions from workers in the construction and manufacturing sectors.

As of September 1, the SLI recorded 3,079 accidents at work, including 23 fatal accidents, compared with 2,930 and 22, respectively, in 2021. Most accidents occurred in the transport, construction, processing, and agricultural sectors. To address the problem, the inspectorate continued conducting a series of training seminars for inspectors on technical labor inspection.

The SLI also issued reports on downtime arrangements, recommendations and regulations on labor relations during emergency situations and quarantines, and support to workers and employers available during a pandemic. Inspectors have the authority to make unannounced inspections. Responsibility for identifying unsafe situations remains with OSH experts and not the worker. The law provides workers the right to remove themselves from a hazardous workplace without jeopardizing their employment. Workers have the legal right to request compensation for health concerns arising from dangerous working conditions. Health-care workers were overloaded and at the greatest risk during the COVID-19 pandemic. The SLI organized 210 consultations and educational events on occupational safety and health and human trafficking prevention, which were attended by more than 4,700 persons. For example, on May 19, the SLI organized a conference entitled “Safe employee – safer society” at the Mykolas Romeris University.

Informal Sector: The informal economy accounted for an estimated 23.1 percent of the economy in 2021.